

Office Supply Scams

The scam: A telephone caller claims to represent a "distributor" for toner, computer disks, or paper used by your company. The caller may offer the product at a "reduced rate" or may offer you a "discount" for a large order.

The caller usually calls in advance to learn what supplies your business uses. The supplies offered are generally low quality and more expensive than name brands.

What to do: Order office supplies only from suppliers with whom you are familiar. Instruct employees not to give out information about supplies over the phone. Designate one person to be in charge of ordering and billing, and if a package comes COD, be sure you ordered it before paying for it.

Unordered Goods

The scam: Your business receives office supplies or other goods that were not ordered. The bill may even list the name of someone in your company to make it seem authentic.

What to do: Demand proof of the order. If you did not order it, chapter 556A of the Iowa Code states that you are not required to return or pay for the goods. Send a letter to the company stating your position.



Phony Invoices

The scam: Your business receives an invoice for equipment, supplies or services that were never ordered or delivered. The invoice may even list the name of a member of your company authorizing the purchase.

What to do: Alert employees to watch for invoices from unusual or unknown suppliers (usually from out of state). Urge employees to check records before paying invoices to see if supplies were authorized, ordered, and delivered. Demand proof of order and delivery of merchandise.



Charity Solicitations

The scam: A solicitor calls and asks your business to make a contribution to a charity. Only a small percentage of your contribution may go to the charitable purpose, however the majority may go towards paying the other expenses of fund-raising.

What to do: Ask questions: What group is behind the solicitation? Is the caller a paid solicitor? How much of your contribution will actually go to the charity instead of a paid solicitor? Will the charity provide you with written information to review?

Novelties

The scam: A telephone caller offers you a "deal" on a promotional novelty, such as pens or coffee mugs imprinted with your company's name. The caller may even offer you a prize, such as cash or a trip.

Sometimes victims who pay in advance never receive their merchandise or prize. Those who do receive their order may discover that the novelties are inferior – the printing rubs off – and the prize is equally worthless.

What to do: Order promotional items only from a company with which you are familiar. Ask for a sample of the novelty before you order. Don't pay for an order in advance, and don't make a purchase just to receive a prize.

Phony Ad Sales

The scam: A caller offers ad space in a publication – looking like a Yellow Pages directory or an "official publication" of a reputable-sounding organization – and requests advance payment. Or, you may receive an invoice to renew an ad, though you never placed one in this publication. The publication being sold will probably never be printed, or, if it is, will receive minimal distribution.

What to do: Examine copies of the publication before placing an ad. Request verifiable circulation and distribution plans.

Phone Slamming

The scam: You receive your long distance phone bill and you discover you now have a different long distance carrier, and possibly, higher than expected charges per call. You did not authorize a switch in service – you've been "slammed."

What to do: Alert your employees to beware of calls or mail solicitations from long distance carriers. If you do not want to switch services, make that very clear to both employees and callers.

Contact your local phone company and "freeze" your chosen long distance account.

Closely review your phone bill each month for any unauthorized charges or additional fees. Make sure the long distance service you have is the one you selected.

Also beware of additional, unauthorized services (such as "call waiting" or "club memberships") charged on your local phone bill – this practice is known as "cramming".

If you have been "slammed" or "crammed" contact your local telephone company and the long distance carrier that switched you and dispute the unauthorized charges.

